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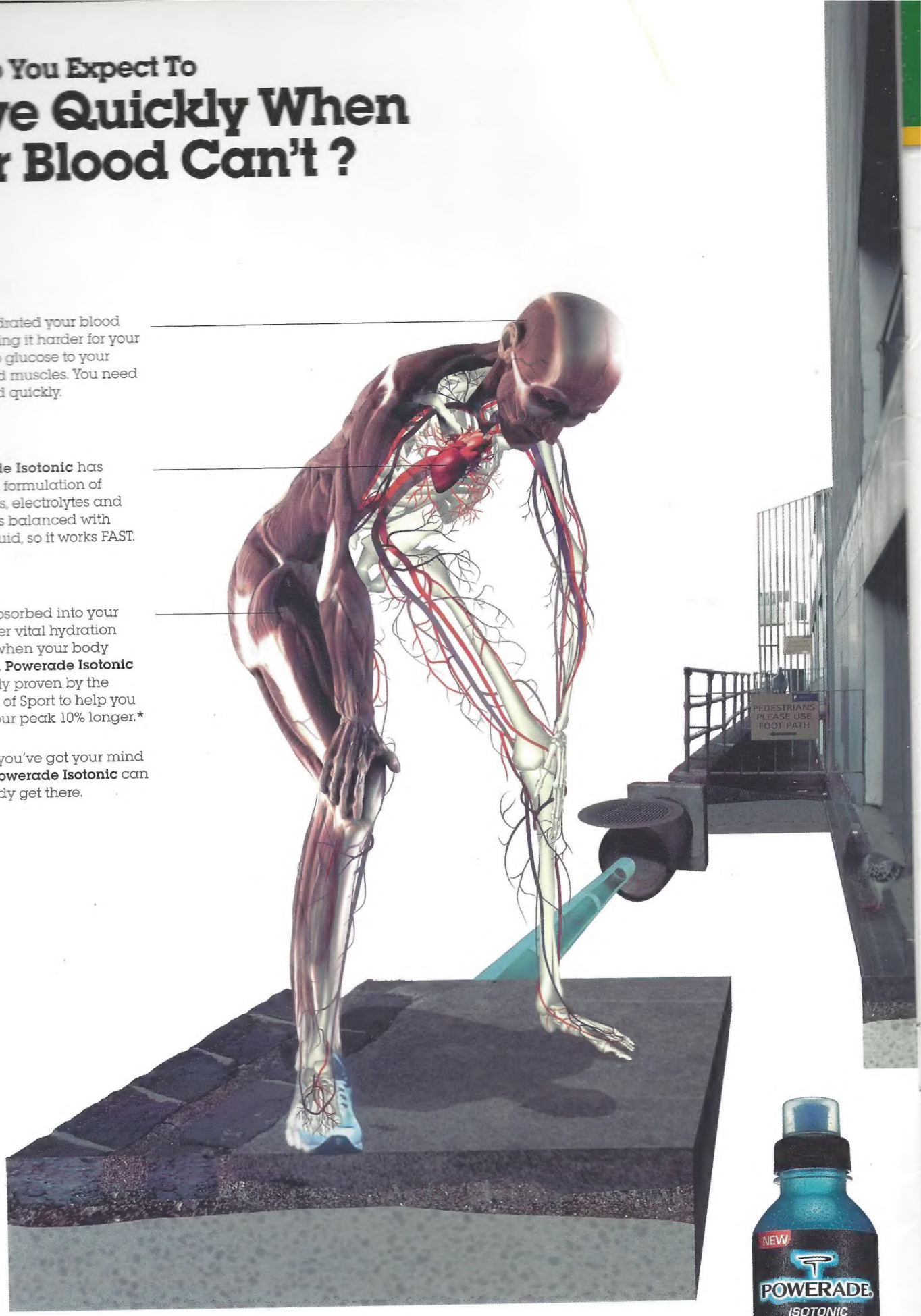

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*When tested against a placebo by the NSW Institute of Sport, March 2006. For research abstract refer to nswis.com.au

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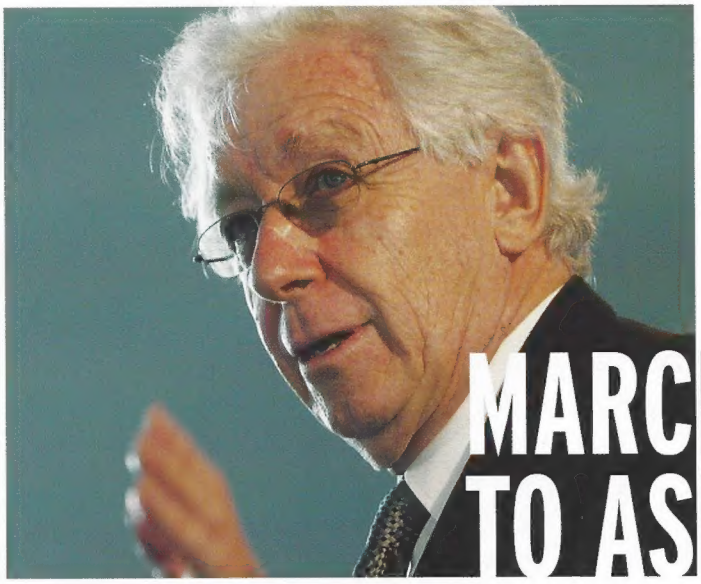
FRANK LOWY AC



MARCHING ONWARDS TO ASIA 2007

"These performances were a real coming of age for us as a football nation."

On behalf of the Board of Football Federation Australia, welcome to Aussie Stadium for the Asian Cup qualifying match between the Qantas Socceroos and Bahrain.

A little under 12 months ago, history was made when we qualified for the 2006 FIFA World Cup by defeating Uruguay on penalties in Sydney. The Qantas Socceroos then went on to the world's biggest football stage and performed admirably against Japan, Brazil and Croatia before being narrowly defeated by the eventual World Champions, Italy. These four matches enthralled not just Australians, but football fans around the world who praised our attacking, never-say-die style of play. These performances were a real coming of age for us as a football nation.

Tonight's match and the game last weekend against Paraguay, is giving football fans in Australia an opportunity to cheer on the players that gave us so much joy from their outstanding feats in Germany. Sadly, it will also be an opportunity to say farewell to a number of Qantas Socceroos who have recently announced their retirement from international football following many years of dedicated service. To these players I say thanks for the memories and all the best for your future pursuits.

Apart from celebrating the past, tonight's match will also signal the beginning of our preparations for the AFC Asian Cup 2007. Having recently qualified for this major event in our confederation, we are keen to keep the momentum from Germany going and show the region why we deserve to be the top ranked nation in Asia by winning the tournament.

Our opponents tonight, Bahrain, will be hoping to improve their chances of qualifying for the Asian Cup against the Qantas Socceroos and we wish them well with their final match against Kuwait.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the valuable support of the NSW Government and thank all our partners: Qantas, Nike, Hyundai, Powerade, Telstra, National Australia Bank, Westfield, Australian Sports Commission and SBS.

Best Wishes

Frank Lowy AC
Chairman
Football Federation Australia

Tune your run.

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MORRIS IEMMA

ON THE ROAD TO MORE SUCCESS

"The 2006 FIFA World Cup finals crowned the most successful year ever for Australian football."

The outstanding performance of the Qantas Socceroos in the 2006 FIFA World Cup finals crowned the most successful year ever for Australian football. It was the year Australian football came of age, not just with our World Cup performance but with the success of the Hyundai A-League and our triumphant entry into the Asian Football Confederation.

Tonight's Australia-Bahrain match is yet more proof of how membership of the Asian Football Confederation is lifting our football horizons. Membership of the Confederation puts Australia into one of the world's most exciting football regions, a competitive arena in which to build a stronger football culture on the long journey to the 2010 World Cup.

Already, Australia has qualified for the 2007 Asian Cup, and tonight we look forward to a robust and competitive clash with our good friends from Bahrain.

On behalf of the Government and people of New South Wales, I extend a warm and generous welcome to members of the Bahraini team and wish both sides well.

Morris Iemma
MP Premier and
Minister for State Development

03 MUSCAT'S BLAST KEEPS OUR 2002 DREAMS ALIVE

URUGUAY. FOR SO LONG after these 2001 World Cup qualifier matches, this small South American nation became our nemesis side - almost by default, really.

This year marked the first time the Qantas Socceroos were given the tricky task of qualifying against the fifth-placed South American side and the do-or-die situation was almost unbearable. In front of 84,656 screaming fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the Socceroos played out the heart-wrenching first leg in a bid to exorcise the demons still haunting them from the previous failed World Cup campaign against Iran. It was 20 November 2001. More importantly, it was a new chance to reach the world stage.

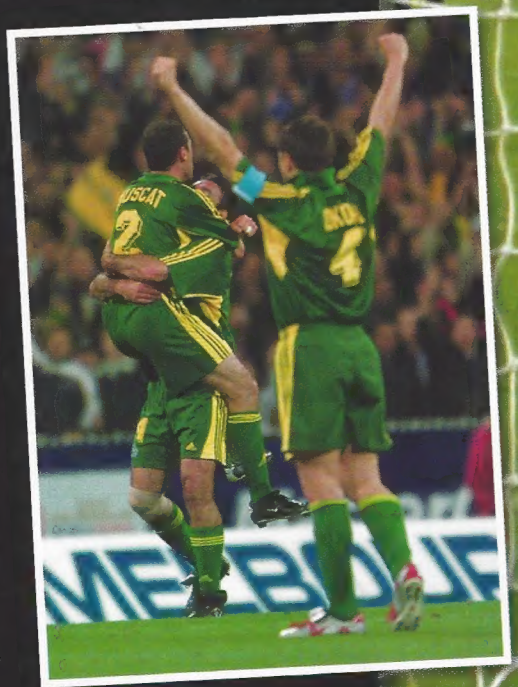
With little experience against South American teams, Uruguay was somewhat of an unknown quantity. Most of the danger revolved around attacking playmakers Dario Silva and Alvaro Recoba. If we could contain them, we were half way to a result.

Our own stars - Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell - were headline acts at their then-club Leeds United. Fingers across Australia were crossed in the hope that one of them, both of them, would be able to find the net. The pair were backed up by a supporting cast filled with some of our most gifted players ever. And Kevin Muscat, our tough defender, added steel in the backline.

As the game played out, it was a dramatic encounter and neither side was able to break down the opposition. The Socceroos were limited to a handful of half chances but hearts were in mouths. Something needed to happen.

At half-time Frank Farina replaced Stan Lazaridis who made way for striker Paul Agostino. The 1860 Munich striker immediately made an impression, his quick dashes and smart positioning sparked life back into our attack and put Uruguay's defenders on the back foot. On the 78th minute Agostino was brought down in the box by Paolo Montero. Referee Graziano Cesare pointed to the spot. Penalty!

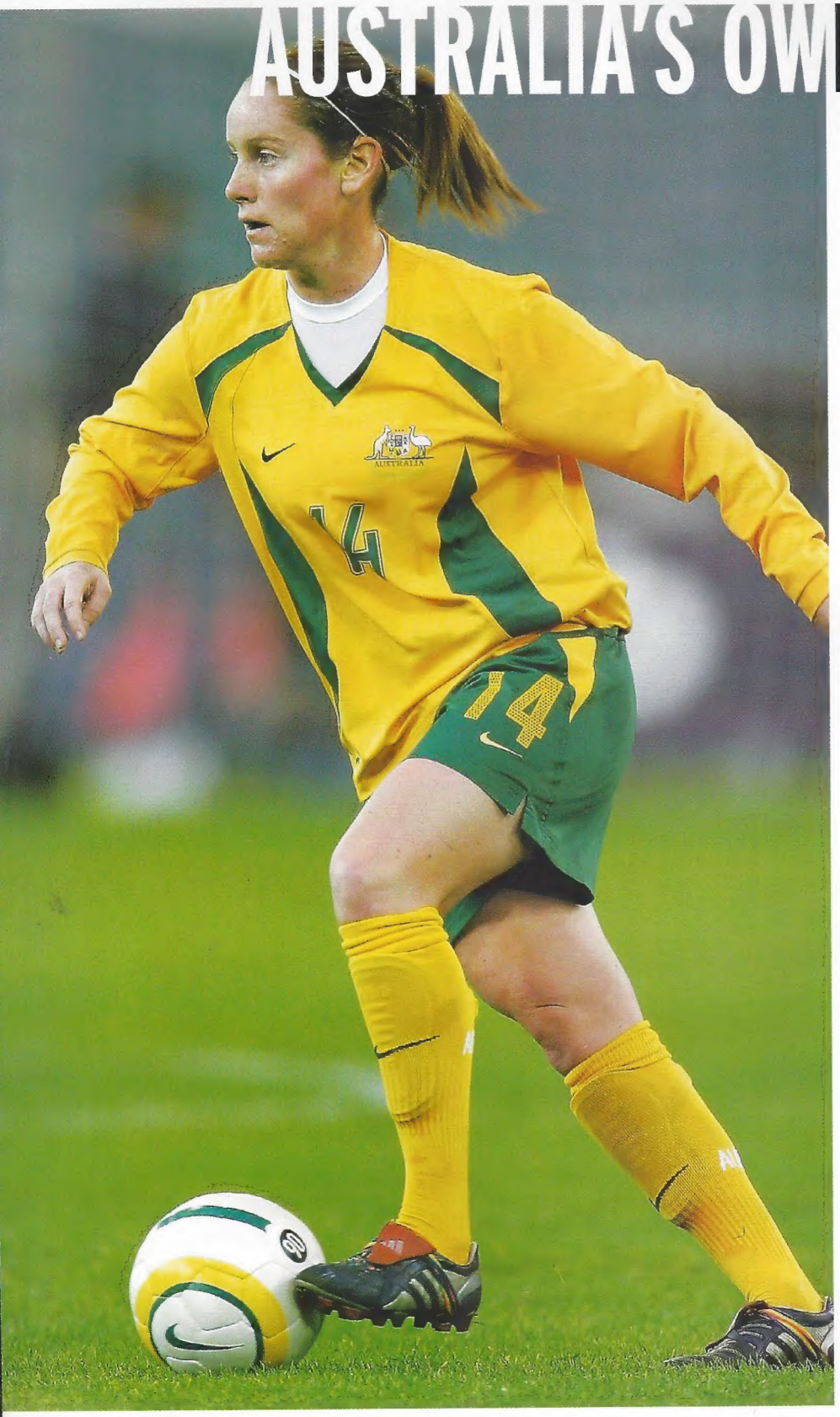
Kevin Muscat stepped up and took the penalty in front of his home crowd. Cheekily, and with huge risk, Muscat blasted the ball straight at the goalie Fabian Carini - who dove to the right. Afterwards Muscat said: "I did have my Mum and Dad and all my family as well, so it was a special occasion mate. We savoured it, but there's still a lot of work to be done."



It was special. And in hindsight, it's probably one that Socceroo fans cherish even more dearly because of the nightmare that was to follow during the return leg in Montevideo just five days later. Regardless, it was a truly golden moment.

Richie Young

AUSTRALIA'S OWN ALL-STAR



Collette McCallum is named in FIFA's All-Star side after the Women's World Championships, ending her Qantas Young Matildas campaign on a high

Despite Australia failing to make it to the second round in Russia, Collette McCallum's efforts for the Young Matildas have been recognised with her coveted inclusion in the FIFA selected All-Star team.

McCallum was the only Australian to be included in the 21-player line-up which included two Brazilians and one Russian, who all competed against Australia in the group stages.

McCallum scored twice in the opening game of the tournament, which helped the Young Matildas get off to a flying start with a 3-0 victory over an old Oceania foe, New Zealand.

Australia, however, slipped up against eventual bronze medal winners, Brazil. The Young Matildas went down 2-0 to the South Americans, setting up a 'do or die' encounter with host nation Russia. The Young Matildas subsequently failed to secure a place in the second round though after drawing 1-1 with Russia.

Led by McCallum, the side dominated the European Champions but squandered chances before they went behind 15 minutes from time. Despite regaining composure and Danielle Brogan's 85th minute equaliser, the team couldn't find a winning goal.

Meanwhile, the Qantas Matildas face a tough path to the Beijing Olympics in 2008, needing to play 12 fixtures before securing a place, and having been drawn in Group C alongside Chinese Taipei, Myanmar and Uzbekistan.

Overcoming their group opponents will set up a winner takes all contest against DPR Korea and two other qualifiers. DPR Korea is ranked seventh in the world, the highest Asian nation. Australia and DPR Korea met most recently in AFC Women's World Championships in July where they drew. Both have already qualified for the FIFA Women's World Cup 2007. First round qualifying matches commence on 17 February, 2007.

ROUND 'EM UP

The Hyundai A-League is off and flying with impressive crowds already exceeding the average attendances set in the first season. This weekend marks round eight and the competition is well and truly heated up with all sides fighting hard for crucial competition points.

New signings, including the Roar's live wire striker Yuning Zhang, the Central Coast's Tony Vidmar, Perth Glory's Stan Lazaridis and the Newcastle Jets' Colombian import Milton Rodriguez and returning ex-Socceroo captain Paul Okon, have ensured the standard of play is at a premium – something that each of the eight sides have already talked about.

Action this weekend takes place in Gosford (the Mariners host Sydney FC on Friday), EnergyAustralia Stadium in Newcastle (the Jets host New Zealand on Saturday), Telstra Dome in Melbourne (the Victory host Adelaide on Sunday) and Members Equity Stadium in Perth (the Glory host the Roar on Sunday).

Get down and support your local football team this season! It's not as you know it...

HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

34 countries, 2 places, 1 gold medal

The road to Olympic gold is long and winding for the U-23s as they compete for a spot in the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

The team could play an unprecedented 14 matches if they are to successfully qualify for a place in the Chinese-hosted games. Central Coast Mariner goalie Danny Vukovic (pictured) and the rest of the side will be aiming to uphold Australia's magnificent record of appearing in every Olympic tournament. The U-23s will need to progress through three different rounds of qualifying including two knockout stages and one group stage.

Round one begins on 7 February with the team playing the first of two legs against Chinese Taipei to secure a place in the second round group stages. Success against the Chinese Taipei squad will see them through to the second round group stages where they will need to top a group containing two powerhouses of Asian football – Iran and Saudi Arabia.

TELSTRA FOOTBALL ANYTIME

Over 80 clubs, schools and community groups are already taking part in Football Federation Australia's latest youth development initiative, Telstra Football Anytime. The aim of the program is to introduce children to football, and display how it can be played anytime, anywhere and with anyone.

Supported by both Hyundai A-League clubs and State member federations, participants take part in games and activities led by qualified FFA coaches.

Available across states and territories, the program has had instant success in Queensland with 10 different locations preparing to host the program.

The FFA will work with schools, clubs, associations and community groups in setting up the six-session program with participants receiving a Nike football, water bottle, bag, markers and information on joining their local football club. Some Hyundai A-League clubs have already offered on-field demonstrations of Telstra Football Anytime either prior to, or at half time at their Hyundai A-League fixtures. For more info go to: www.footballaustralia.com.au

Telstra

Did you know... Jason Culina's first goal for the Qantas Socceroos came at Aussie Stadium in September 2005? • John Aloisi is the only Australian who has played in the English Premier League, Serie A AND La Liga? • In 2002, Josip Skoko captained Genk to the Belgian First Division Championship? • Mark Schwarzer played for Marconi here in Sydney and that he was a teammate there of Italian superstar Christian Vieri? • And that Newcastle Jets captain Paul Okon is also a friend of Christian's? • And on the friends front, Mark Bresciano is a friend of Sydney FC's guest player Benito Carbone!

THE VISION

The Johnny Warren Foundation, launched in October 2004, is an initiative that will provide future football players in NSW with the best integrated football pathway. Johnny's vision is something that continues to drive Australia's players (the Qantas Socceroos are pictured above paying tribute in 2004) and leading commentators; and it is part of the reason the Socceroos are on the world stage today.

The Foundation is backed by the NSW Government and is governed by a board appointed from stakeholders, government, business and community representatives.

An ongoing initiative, the Foundation uses funds in its Programs and Player Development Camps. As such, the Foundation is open to sponsorship contributions. Contributions will help give national exposure to your brand... and will of course, help develop youth football.

Andrew Kemeny, Chairman of the Foundation said, "Johnny lived for football, as an outstanding player and later as a visionary for the advancement of the 'world game' in Australia."

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Determined to progress

Bahrain are a nation on the rise, but face major obstacles in maintaining their status as one of Asia's developing powers

by Jackson Gothe-Snape

BAHRAIN IS a small island nation bulging with football pedigree. The minnow of the Arab community, the country's football team has risen to be one of Asia's most competitive. Narrowly missing out on a place at the 2006 World Cup, Bahrain football has been on the up. But after disappointing results in their first two group matches, a catastrophic failure to qualify for the Asian Cup looms.

Little brother, big boots

Geographically, Bahrain is a dwarf. The whole country would fit inside ACT more than three times! Kuwait, the other nation in Australia's group and the little brother of regional giants Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia is a behemoth in comparison at more than 25 times the size of Bahrain. There is even a nearby airport in Saudi Arabia that is larger than Bahrain.

But the country's size hasn't hindered their football success. From a population of 700,000, Bahrain have built a side that in recent years has been the envy of much of Asia. The team secured fourth place in the 2004 Asian Cup, earning them the title of FIFA's most improved team for that year, and only fell at the final qualifying hurdle against Trinidad and Tobago.

Both achievements were significant,

PENALTY BLUNDER

Bahrain were the beneficiaries of one of football's biggest controversies last year. In the crucial final Asian qualification tie to determine who was to meet Trinidad and Tobago, Bahrain met central Asian nation Uzbekistan in a two-legged affair. Uzbekistan won the first leg at home 1-0, but the match featured a contentious refereeing blunder in the 39th-minute. After the Uzbeks scored from the penalty spot to supposedly make it 2-0, the referee rightly noted that an attacking player had entered the goal box before the kick had been taken. However, instead of correctly ordering a retake of the penalty, he gave a free-kick to Bahrain! Uzbekistan requested a forfeit and 3-0 score line but FIFA ordered a replay, which finished 1-1. The second leg finished 0-0 and Bahrain were through on away goals!

Bahrain prior to their World Cup qualifier against Trinidad and Tobago in Port-of-Spain last November

"From a population of 700 000, Bahrain have built a side that in recent years has been the envy of much of Asia."

but could have been even better with a little bit of luck. In the Asian Cup of 2004, Bahrain and Japan were evenly poised at 2-2 with only minutes to go. As millions watched, Bahrain's Duaij's Naser scored to put Bahrain in the lead. Japan, Asian football royalty, were on the verge of being ousted by relative minnows! However, it was not to be. Bahrain's hearts were broken as Japan equalised in the very last minute.

Tired after an epic penalty victory over Uzbekistan in the preceding round, Bahrain couldn't reclaim the initiative and a Japanese goal early in extra-time sent them on their way.

Last November, as Australia were tackling Uruguay, Bahrain were playing Trinidad and Tobago on the other side of the world. A 1-1 draw in the Caribbean meant that Bahrain were well-positioned to qualify for Germany. Yet a Dwight Yorke-inspired T' and T' side stole Bahrain's thunder, sneaking a 1-0 win that earned them a World Cup place.

The new man's initiation

Bahrain have recently installed former West German international defender

VITAL STATISTICS

FIFA ranking: 98

Highest ranking: 44 (Sep 2004)

Founded: 1957

Joined FIFA: 1966

Joined AFC: 1970

Most caps: Abdulrazzaq Mohamed (102)

Top scorer: Ala'a Hubail (30)

Hans-Peter Briegel as coach. The two-time World Cup runner-up turns 51 today, and succeeds the Croatian Luka Peruzovic who nearly earned an unprecedented Bahrain World Cup appearance, but who was sacked after Bahrain's loss to Australia in February. Briegel was a key defender in West Germany's 1982 and 1986 World Cup runners-up squads that also featured Lothar Matthaus and former Sydney FC coach Pierre Littbarski.

But Briegel hasn't enjoyed any success in his four months in charge. A 1-0 friendly defeat to neighbours Saudi Arabia in August was followed by a 2-0 loss to Jordan last month. For Bahrain this form slump is a major concern.

Bahrain's battle

Their Asian Cup campaign hangs in the balance. Their home defeat to Australia earlier this year was disappointing after they led the Socceroos at half-time. A 0-0 stalemate away to Kuwait, along with Kuwait's impressive victory over Australia last month means Bahrain are bottom of the group with a solitary point. The good news for Bahrain is that whatever happens in Sydney tonight, they will still have a chance of making the Asian Cup finals. A win for Bahrain in their final match of the group, at home to Kuwait next month, will be enough for qualification. If Bahrain can win here tonight, then a

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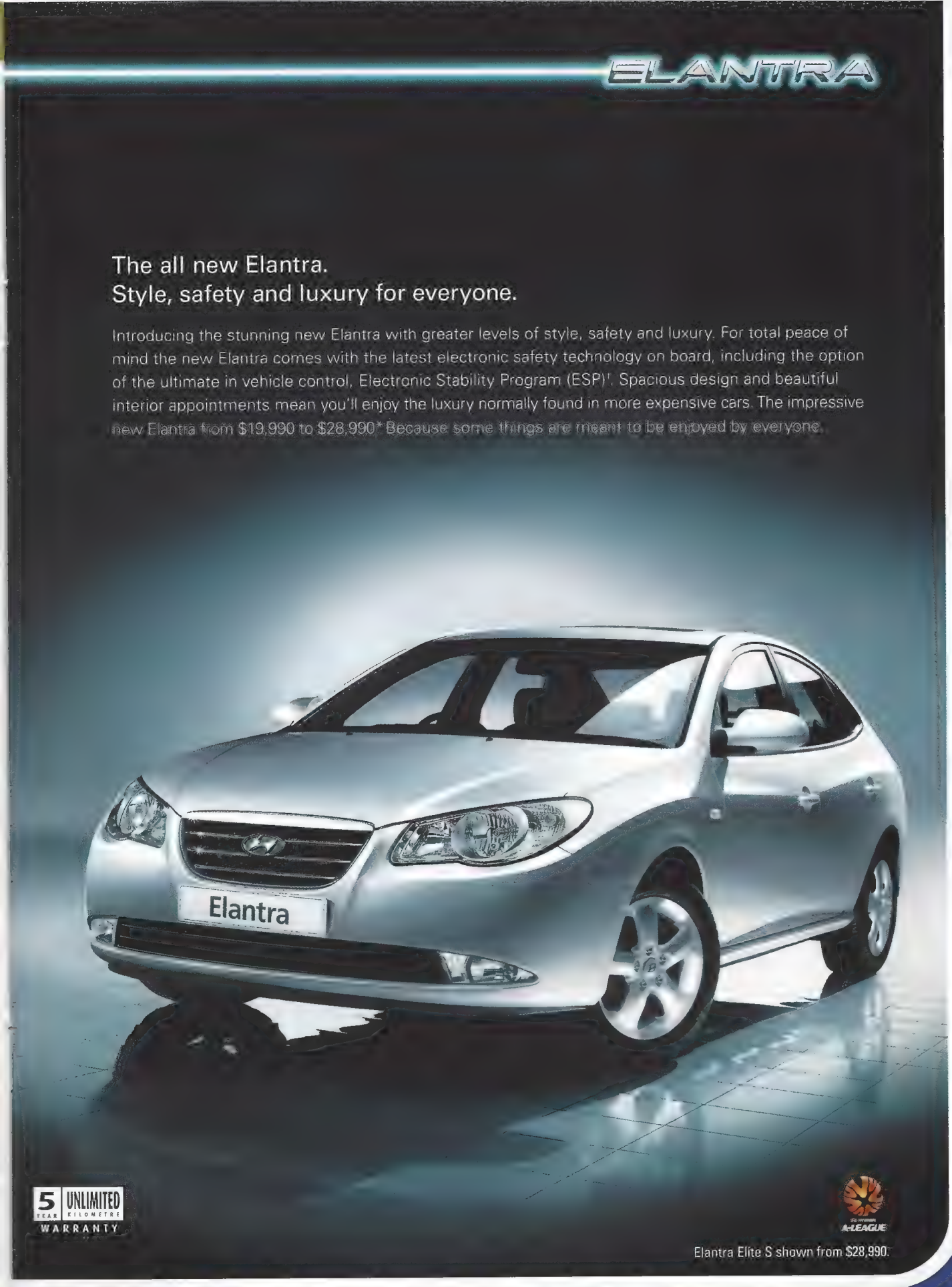

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draw next month might even be enough.

The recent retirement of star playmaker Talal Yousuf after the failure to qualify for the World Cup has heaped even more pressure on Bahrain's other players. The team is made up of a mix of professionals playing in nearby leagues such as Qatar and locally-based semi-professional players.

Forward Hussain Ali will be looking for another goal after opening the scoring against Australia in February, but if Bahrain are to be successful they need a big performance from diminutive striker and one-time star of regional Pespi commercials, Ala'a Hubail. Veteran goalkeeper Ali Hassan might make a return after a recent injury, but defender Hussain Baba is still out suspended after picking up a four-match suspension from a fracas in the match against Trinidad and Tobago, along with injured midfielder Mahmood Jalal. ■

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

In the lead-up to June's World Cup 2006 finals, Tunisia were seeking friendly matches with Middle Eastern opposition. They faced Saudi Arabia in their group, and were looking to prepare against similar players and skills. Recognising Bahrain's pedigree and similarity with their Saudi neighbours, Tunisia approached Bahrain with the offer of a friendly. However, the Bahrain football body apparently declined the invitation because they claimed they were supporting Saudi Arabia and would stand by them. In the end, Tunisia scored a late equaliser against the Saudis in the World Cup to draw 2-2, but neither team qualified from their group.

PAY DAY IN MANAMA

Bahrain have earned their fair share of headlines in recent years. In addition to the controversy around the penalty in Uzbekistan, the World Cup play-off second-leg match against Trinidad and Tobago ended in extraordinary drama. With time ticking away, Trinidad veterans Russell Latapy and Dwight Yorke were keeping possession in Bahrain's corner as the home team's frustrations were growing. A violent Bahrain challenge on Yorke started a fracas which incited the Manana crowd to shower the pitch in bottles.

Not long after the referee restored order, the ball was up the other end in Trinidad goalie Kelvin Jack's hands. As he went to clear it, Hussain Ali desperately kicked it away from him as he tried to punt it up field. Ali slotted the ball home, but the referee correctly ruled it out. This incensed the Bahrain players, who surrounded the referee, demanding the goal stand. The Bahrain coaching staff helped find calm, but only after defender Hussain Baba was sent off. Moments later, Jack produced a spectacular save to deny a goal-bound Bahrain effort, before the whistle went and the World Cup dreams of Bahrain, so confident at the start of the match, were shattered.

BAHRAIN:
Players to Watch

ALA'A HUBAIL
Though short and somewhat lightweight, Hubail has become one of Bahrain's shining lights. His electric pace and sound finishing ability has not been affected by a long injury layoff last year, and he has been top scorer in the Qatari leagues with his club Al-Gharafa. Hubail's career highlight was the 2004 Asian Cup, where he was joint top scorer with Ali Karimi, bagging five goals.

HUSSAIN ALI
Hussain Ali is a powerful forward with excellent overall technical ability that makes him a danger in and around the box. He is best known internationally for being so desperate to score against Trinidad and Tobago in last year's World Cup qualifying playoff that he knocked the ball away from the opposition goalkeeper while he was trying to kick it up field. Like Hubail, he has been top scorer in the Qatari league.

MOHAMMED HUBAIL
Down the right flank, Mohammed Hubail is known for his mesmerising runs and creative delivery for Bahrain's potent strikers. He plays in Saudi Arabia for one of the country's biggest clubs in Al Ahli. Hubail's pace will test Scott Chipperfield, and his high work rate means that this match-up will provide one of the key one-on-one battles for the entire match.

MOHAMMED SALMEEN
Captain of the Bahrain side, Mohammed Salmeen is a technically gifted all-round midfielder. A teammate of Tony Popovic at Al-Arabi in Qatar, Salmeen carries much of the creative burden of the Bahrain side since the retirement of Talal Yusuf. However, the team is in good hands, thanks to Salmeen's sharp passing, powerful shot and ability to read the game.

SALMAN ISA
Salman Isa scored for Bahrain in the first leg against Trinidad and Tobago to give them the lead away from home. A very experienced player, Isa is a veteran of the Bahrain league with Al Riffa, but is now enjoying a stint alongside Bahrain captain Mohammed Salmeen at Tony Popovic's club Al Arabi. He is very versatile player and is able to fill in at fullback, winger or forward.

COACH – HANS-PETER BRIEGEL
Briegel was a legendary defender for West Germany in the 1980s, having played alongside Lothar Matthaus in consecutive World Cup runners-up campaigns. He was actually a longtime player for FC Kaiserslautern in the Bundesliga, the town the Socceroos remember so well from their matches against Japan and Italy at the World Cup. As a coach he has enjoyed moderate success with Albania before taking over Bahrain in June.

TONIGHT'S SQUAD

ALI HASSAN

ABDULLA AL DEKHEL

EBRAHIM AL MISHKHAS

FAWZI MUBARAK

ALI AMER

RAHID AL DOSSARY
(ALL MUHARRAQ)

MOHAMMED HUBAIL

MOHAMMED HUSSAIN

AHMED AL HUJAIRI

ALI SAEED (AL AHLI)

HAMA RAKEA

ABDULLA AL MARZOOQI (RIFFA)

ALI ABDULLA (AL SHABAB)

ISMAIL ABDULLATIF (AL HALA)

SAYED MOHAMMED JAFFER
(L MALKIYA)

ALI AL SHEHABI (AL NAJMA)

HUSSAIN ALI
(UMM SALAL, QATAR)

MOHAMMED SALMEEN

SALMAN ISA (AL ARABI, QATAR)

ALA'A HUBAIL
(AL GHARRAFA, QATAR)

SAYED MOHAMMED ADNAN
(QATAR)

HUSSAIN SALMAN
(AL WASL, UAE).

Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

WINNING PARTNERSHIP

The Australian Sports Commission proudly supports Football Federation Australia

The Australian Sports Commission is the Australian Government agency that develops, manages and invests in sport at all levels in Australia. Football Federation Australia has worked closely with the Australian Sports Commission to develop football from community participation to high-level performance.

Football Federation Australia is one of many national sporting organisations that has formed a winning partnership with the Australian Sports Commission to develop its sport in Australia.

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The Best of Asia

Which teams stand between the Socceroos and Asian Cup glory? Today is the fifth match day of the qualification process... and our rivals have emerged

by Jackson Gothe-Snape

LEBANON'S UNFORTUNATE withdrawal from the Asian Cup Qualifying Group D provided the Qantas Socceroos with a surprisingly easy passage through the qualification process. Having beaten Bahrain in the first match, Australia's defeat of Kuwait in Sydney on 16 August ensured the Socceroos were the first team to qualify for the 2007 Asian Cup. But Asian competition is fierce, as we recently learnt in Kuwait. Buoyed by our qualification, the Socceroos went down 0-2 in the return leg against a tough Kuwaiti side played in oppressive heat.

Elsewhere in Asia, more than 20 other Asian nations have been battling it out to make it through to the final tournament, to be jointly hosted by Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia next July. Now, the picture of the final countries is becoming clear. Joining Australia as confirmed qualifiers are Qatar, United Arab Emirates, three-time champions Saudi Arabia and reigning champions Japan; while heavyweights Korea and Iran also have one foot in the door. For others though – such as 2004 hosts and finalists China – there's still plenty of work to be done.

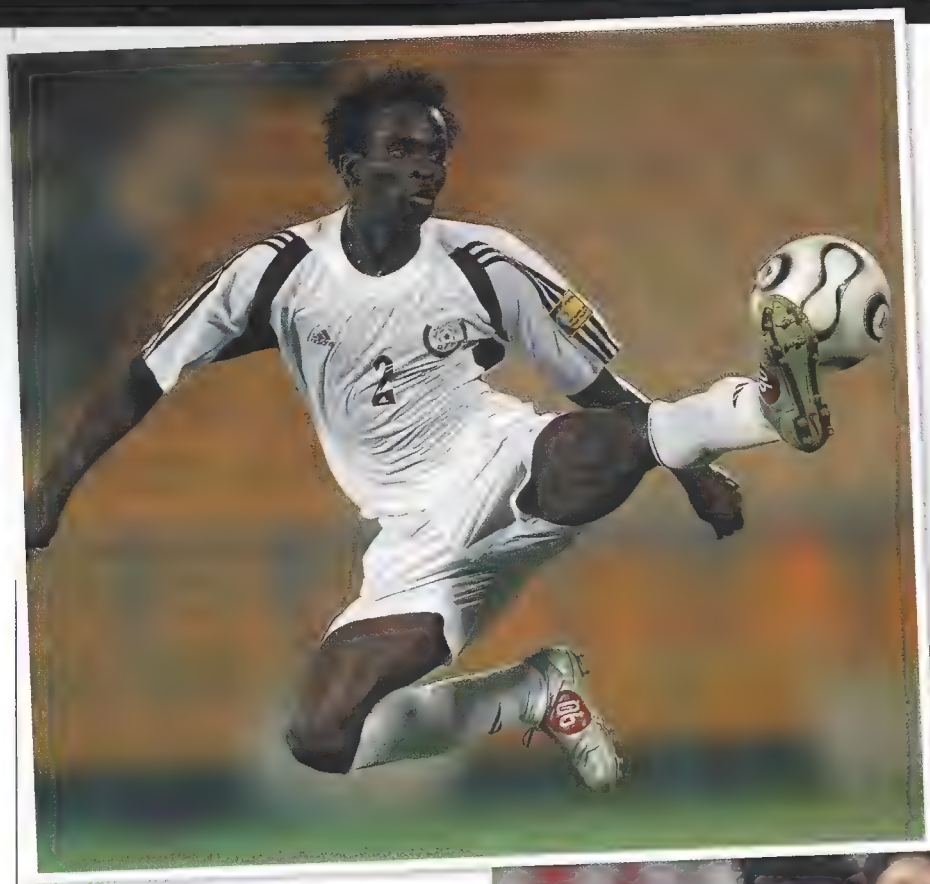
"The Saudis have a perfect record after four matches, one of only two teams in the qualifying tournament with this claim."

Pain for Bahrain

Bahrain, Australia's opponents tonight will be desperate to win to avoid a last-ditch play-off against Kuwait. After a semi-final appearance at the 2004 Asian Cup and a near-miss in qualifying for the 2006 World Cup, Bahrain were among the first seeds in this qualifying campaign – ahead of such nations as Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. However, the loss to Australia at home in February, together with a 0-0 draw away to Kuwait and Kuwait's recent victory over Australia, has put them on the back foot. Unless they beat the Socceroos tonight, Bahrain will face a must-win tie against Kuwait next month to qualify.

In Group A, Japan and Saudi Arabia have streaked through, ahead of Yemen and India. The two sides have scored a combined total of 24 goals and conceded just two. The Saudis have a perfect record after four matches, one of only two teams in the qualifying tournament with this claim. Though Japan lost to the Saudis, their two defeats of Yemen mean that due to the six-point deficit and head-to-head results the Japanese cannot be overtaken.

Group B is more even, though both Korea and Iran are still close to qualification. Syria are struggling to keep in touch with the top two, and

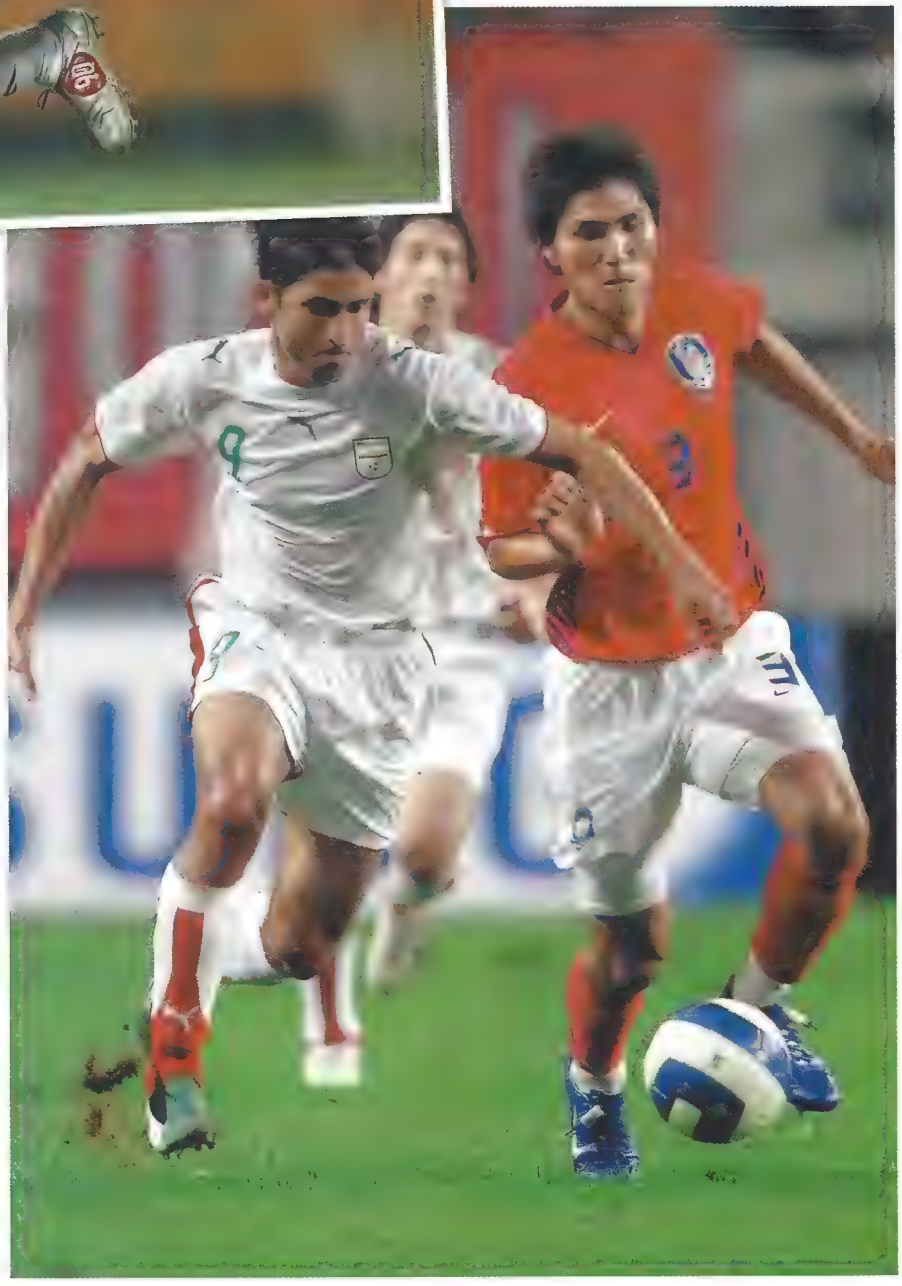


BANGKOK TO BUNGKARNO

The Asian Football Confederation recently announced the host cities of the 2007 Asian Cup's major matches. The opening ceremony and match will be held in Bangkok, Thailand and the semi-finals will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Hanoi, Vietnam. Finally, the final will be held in Jakarta, Indonesia in the giant 100,000-seat Gelora Bungkarno Stadium.

unless they win away against Korea today, they are out. The group also contains whipping boys Chinese Taipei, who have conceded 19 goals in four matches without scoring one.

Group C is even tighter, though the United Arab Emirates have already qualified. Oman sit in second, five points ahead of Jordan. Below them, Pakistan have lost all their matches. Though mathematically still possible, for Jordan to qualify they need Oman to draw or lose at home to the UAE, then beat Oman by more than three goals in their final mach - a very unlikely scenario.



QUALIFYING FIGURES

MOST GOALS SCORED: 15
- Saudi Arabia

MOST GOALS CONCEDED: 19
- Chinese Taipei, India

LEAST GOALS SCORED: 0
- Chinese Taipei

LEAST GOALS CONCEDED: 1
- Saudi Arabia, Japan

HIGHEST SCORING MATCH: 6 SEPT
- Korea 8, Chinese Taipei 0

TOP GOAL-SCORERS: 4
- Ahmed Al Suwaileh (Saudi Arabia),
- Jung Jo-Gook (Korea)

The life of Group E

Group E is the closest of all, with all teams still a chance of qualifying. Favourites Iraq and China are tied in the lead, three points ahead of Singapore and Palestine. If Iraq beat Singapore at home, and China beat Palestine away today, they will both qualify. If that doesn't happen though, next month's matches of China and Singapore at home to Iraq and Palestine respectively will be keenly followed.

Qatar have already qualified from Group F with a perfect record, but the battle for second is closely contested. Tiny Hong Kong are battling with Uzbekistan for the final berth. This shootout is destined to go down to the final round, though Hong Kong face an uphill battle to qualify. Draws in both matches between the teams mean that goal difference will be used to separate the sides if they are tied on points. Hong Kong's goal difference though is some six goals poorer than Uzbekistan's. As a result, Hong Kong need to get a result away to Qatar then beat Bangladesh and hope that Uzbekistan slip up in their own matches against those two sides.

Battle for Asia's best

Soon after the final round of matches are completed in November, AFC House in Kuala Lumpur will host the draw for the Asian Cup Finals. This draw will confirm Australia's group opponents and base host nation. Whatever the draw, the Socceroos will face a significant hurdle in each match.

To progress to the final eight, Australia will have to overcome one of the host nations, most likely one of Asia's heavyweights, and another nation of a similar calibre as Iraq (conquerors of the Aussies in Athens). Even heavy favourites have come unstuck in the past, as Saudi Arabia proved in limping home from the 2004 tournament with just a single point.

But when the first match kicks off on the 7 July next year Australia's squad will be, barring injury, filled with its European-based stars. It will be Australia's third ever appearance at a major tournament, and more than a billion people will be watching.

The 2007 Asian Cup will be the opportunity to show that Germany was no fluke. Mark down the day of final – 29th July. In less than nine months, the Socceroos will have the chance to prove they are Asia's best. ■

QUALIFIERS SO FAR

HOSTS:
Thailand
Malaysia
Vietnam
Indonesia

ALREADY QUALIFIED:
Australia
Japan
Saudi Arabia
Qatar
United Arab Emirates

LIKELY QUALIFIERS:
China
Iran
Iraq
Korea
Kuwait
Oman
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JASON CULINA

ON THE RISE

Since his 2005 move to PSV, Jason Culina's feet have hardly touched the ground. And there's more to come...

by Sam Pilger

JASON CULINA has enjoyed a meteoric ascendency through the footballing ranks.

In just over three seasons, he has risen from bench warmer at Dutch giants Ajax to one of the first names on the Qantas Socceroo team sheet, via impressive stints at fellow Dutch sides Twente and PSV Eindhoven.

And it's no small coincidence that Culina's rise to prominence has much to do with former Socceroo boss Guus Hiddink, who brought the 26 year-old to PSV at the beginning of the 2005 season as well as installing him at the heart of the Australian engine room.

Now, after a successful World Cup, his coach might be different but the goal remains the same: Asian Cup glory.

What do you expect from Bahrain in this game?
They are a bit of an unknown quantity to me, but most games at international level are tough, so we'll respect them. Even so we have to be confident of winning, especially as we've got home advantage. I know we beat them 3-1 over in Bahrain back in February and I caught some of the highlights. It looked like a comfortable win and hopefully we can repeat that in this game.

What was your reaction to the defeat to Kuwait last month?
It was very disappointing because we should beat teams like Kuwait but the conditions weren't easy over there. I think the fact that we had already qualified for the Asian Cup probably took the edge off the game for our guys.

How do you think Australia will do in next year's Asian Cup?
I really think we've got a great chance to win the whole tournament. As we showed at the World Cup we've got a very talented side and if we can keep the majority of that side from Germany together and add a few young guys we can do very well.

Who will be Australia's main rivals at the Asian Cup?
I reckon we'll start as favourites along with Japan and South Korea, but I would fancy our chances of beating both of them. They are good and very fit sides who can play some good football if you let them settle on the ball. But we proved we could beat Japan at the World Cup and when we play them again we need to be aggressive and put them under the same pressure.

Are you enjoying the challenge of playing in Asia rather than Oceania?
This is just what we needed to help our

"I can't wait to see the rest of the guys, it will be the first time since the World Cup. It will be great to get that buzz back, there's nothing like it."

progress. It could get pretty hard to motivate yourself to play against Fiji and the Solomon Islands. Playing against the Asian teams will make us a stronger and better prepared to perform in international football.

This will be your first game for Australia since the World Cup, so what are you most looking forward to?
I can't wait to see the rest of the guys, it will be the first time since the World Cup. It will be great to get that buzz back, there is nothing like it. I'm looking forward to catching up with the rest of the guys and reflecting on the World Cup. We didn't have any time after the last game against Italy to do that because the next morning we all went our separate ways, so it will be great to get everyone together again.

How has the team responded to playing under Graham Arnold?
He has done well with limited resources in his first couple of games. We all respect Graham, he knows the game very well and learned a lot working with Guus Hiddink. While Guus got all the praise, Graham played a major role in us qualifying for the World Cup and then doing well in Germany. He did a lot of the hard work behind the scenes.

What are your main memories of the World Cup?
My last memory was a disappointing one as of course we were knocked out by Italy, but looking back I have a lot of pride in our performances. It was the first time any of us had been to the World Cup and we got to the knockout stages from a difficult group. There was also a feeling of what might have been. You can't help thinking, "What if?". We so nearly got through against Italy and I think we deserved to go on. If you look at how the draw opened up, we would have played Ukraine in the quarter-finals and they looked beatable. Win that and who knows what might have happened.

Was it difficult watching Italy going all the way knowing how close you came to beating them?
When we got knocked out I didn't watch another game, not even the final. It was too painful. I went away on holiday and forgot about the World Cup. I didn't hold any grudges towards Italy, not at all, in fact at least we could say we lost to the eventual winners.

What were your favourite moments of the whole experience?
It has to be getting that draw with Croatia to qualify for the knock-out stages in Stuttgart. That was such a great night. We probably went overboard with our celebrations, going on a long lap of honour but it was such a special moment which might never happen again, so I'm glad we did it. After the game Archie [Thompson] grabbed a corner flag and sang into it. Unfortunately I was back in the dressing room and missed it. He came back in buzzing about it and said, "I'm a rock

VITAL STATISTICS

Born: 5 August, 1980, Melbourne, Australia
Height: 175 cms
Weight: 72 kgs
Debut: v South Africa (D1-1), Durban, February 2005
Last Match: v Italy (L1-0), Kaiserslautern (GER), June 2006

star!" He didn't play a minute at the World Cup, so that was his highlight.

How did you feel about your own performances at the World Cup? Did you do yourself justice?
Yes, I felt I did well out there. I was pleased with my performances in Germany, especially because I was moved around the pitch and had to play in several positions. I took a lot of confidence from the tournament. I reckon I am shown more respect back at PSV because of the World Cup. Every Australian player is respected more because we showed what we could do. Before we were seen as a rugby nation but now we proved we are a football nation as well.

How pleased are you with Mark Viduka's decision not to retire from international football?
It is great for us young guys that experienced players like Mark Viduka, Mark Schwarzer and Craig Moore have all decided to stay on because there was talk that they might retire from international football after the World Cup. It is an honour to play with them because they are guys I have always looked up to.

What are your expectations with PSV Eindhoven this season?
I'm feeling really good about it. We've brought in some new players and I reckon we can do well in both the Dutch league and the Champions League. Obviously Guus Hiddink has left for Russia, so we've got a new manager in Ronald Koeman. I played under him at Ajax and I didn't get much of a run out then, but I've matured since then and I am now getting a fair go in the side. This should be a good season for all of us. ■

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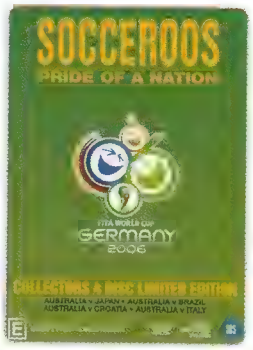

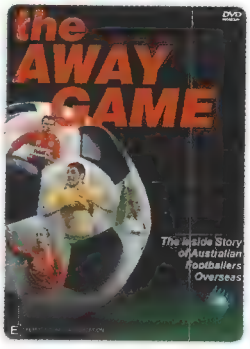

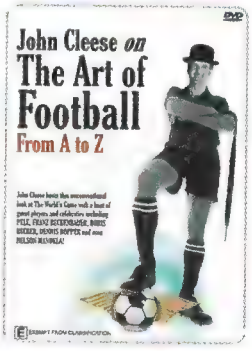

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POPPA THE STOPPER

Tony Popovic has been a Socceroo hero for over 10 years. Tonight marks a new dawn in Australian football, as one of our toughest-ever defenders steps aside to turn from player to fan

by Richie Young

HOW WILL WE BEST remember Tony Popovic? As one of the first-chosen players in the Qantas Socceroo squad for the past decade Popovic has seen a lot of game time; and been at the heart of some of Australia's most heartbreaking and inspiring sporting moments. While he has been one of our most consistent performers, "Poppa" hasn't always received the accolades of some of his more revered teammates. It was his very efforts though, that helped get the 'Roos to their finest moment of all: qualifying for the World Cup.

It was Poppa who most memorably marked Alvaro Recoba – Uruguay's danger man – out of the second qualifier in Sydney. That night he gave so much heavy-handed attention to Recoba that it completely nullified the Inter Milan star's sharp game and forced him to leave the field complaining of weary legs and fatigue. For Poppa, he then made way for Harry Kewell who sparked the Socceroos' attack back to life which eventually led to Mark Bresciano's goal.

Tonight marks a special occasion for a number of Socceroos; and Poppa

spoke to *The Socceroo* about that night last November with pure joy. He said: "Qualifying against Uruguay was special for me. It had been unfortunate that we'd failed at the last two qualifying campaigns. I then felt that the jinx was there again after the Confederations Cup in Germany where I got injured. I didn't play for three months going into the Uruguay game and I thought, 'here we go again.'

"I thought it would be three campaigns of World Cup qualifying or matches that I'd miss out on but I worked really hard for a couple of weeks with Anthony Crea to give myself an opportunity to at least be fit. Fortunately for me the manager showed faith even though I had no match fitness to play in those games. It was a special moment to be selected and an even greater moment to qualify. And to do it at home in Sydney was something special. That crowd is something that I'll never, ever forget."

Now playing in Qatar for Al-Arabi, the 33 year-old was tempted to play in the Hyundai A-League but says his international adventure isn't over just yet. With a career that has seen him playing for Sydney United to Crystal Palace in England, as well as five years in Japan for Sanfrecce Hiroshima, Poppa is well-travelled (he even speaks fluent Japanese) and is probably the most qualified of all to speak about the complexities of playing away against Asian sides now that we are part of the AFC. Having lost 2-0 against Kuwait recently, debate has raged about how the Socceroos should prepare for Asian opposition after only playing sides from Oceania for so long.

"For me it's pretty simple really," he warns. "If we don't take it seriously, we won't qualify. It's as simple as that. Anyone who thinks it's going to be easy coming through Asia, playing qualifiers on a Wednesday, in soaring heat with players coming from Europe... is crazy.

"It's different conditions and it's very difficult. The Kuwait game showed that. The conditions beat us. Kuwait's not better than us. With a small amount of preparation it's going to be difficult. If we think it's going to be easy we're in for a rude shock. We've got to be as well prepared as we possibly can be. You're battling teams that are used to the conditions and that can play. Most of our squad will be coming from five to 10 degrees playing and training in Europe over eight or nine months and then they'll get hit with 35 to 40 degrees in a World Cup qualifier."

Of course, Popovic has seen both the highs and lows with the Socceroos. But it was his most recent appearance for Australia that provided the best and worst moments during his time in Australian colours. "They both came at the World Cup actually! The best moment I'd say is to get picked to start against Brazil. To do that in the World Cup is a dream come true, but probably the worst was about 40 minutes later when I went off injured.

"It just shows you how things can happen and change so quickly. It was probably a bad day for me that day and for a few hours afterwards. But when the dust settled the next morning I definitely felt more proud than down and disappointed. I thought about it, and on the injury side... I'd done everything I could to be as fit as I possibly could be and it was something unfortunate that happened. It was something I could do nothing about," he says.

"We worked really hard and we were there for a reason. We weren't there just to make up the numbers at the World Cup."

While his game time ended

prematurely and in disappointment, Poppa still feels that just being a part of the camp in Germany – alongside mates – was one of the best experiences of his career. And the enormity and emotion of the occasion was something that wasn't lost on someone more known for his tough exterior.

"The thing is, we all get along great," he says of his Socceroo teammates. "When you're together for five or six weeks... and I can honestly say there were no fallouts, nothing within the group... it is just brilliant. That just shows how close we are and how special the team spirit is.

"We worked really hard and we were there for a reason. We weren't there just to make up the numbers at the World Cup. We were really determined, as the management were, to show what we could do. Training was very intense and all the players responded to it. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity and we wanted to make the most of it. Again, we wanted to show the world what Australia could do and I think we did our country proud."

As tonight is the last time we will see Poppa and some of his other celebrated teammates as Socceroos, the 194-cm defender explained the thoughts behind his decision – and one that comes so agonisingly close to the Asian Cup finals next year. "It would be nice [playing in the Asian Cup finals] but it's something that I've thought about a little bit for a little while and it's just the right time for me to stop. I've been in the national team for over 10 years, I'm very proud for playing for my country and I'm a proud Australian.

"I'm proud of what I've done and to be a part of this but there comes a time where you've got to look ahead and I feel that I'm just delaying the inevitable. I feel that now is the right time for me to do it and for me to move on to other things and for other players to come in and get the job done and do well at the Asian Cup. It's time for me to become a fan now," he explains.

Reflection aside, Poppa has been looking forward to tonight's encounter as well as the 10-day Socceroo camp. He knows that tonight's hit out will be against a side that is desperate to win – and one that features two of his Al-Arabi teammates.

Bahrain midfielders Salman Isa and Mohammed Salmeen (who is also captain) will be out to beat the Socceroos tonight as they remain a chance to qualify for the Asian Cup. Poppa has revealed that the competitive banter has already begun and that he is confident that the Socceroos will win the match. "We've had a bit of a chat and for them, it's a really big game. They were obviously

PARTY LIKE IT'S 1995

TONY POPOVIC made his international debut against Colombia (a side that featured legendary goalkeeper Rene Higuita) and his teammates that day included Zeljko Kalac, Tony Vidmar, Damian Mori, Stan Lazaridis and Steve Corica.

"It was February '95 against Colombia in Brisbane. It was a special moment at a young age. Eddie Thompson, the manager at the time gave me the call-up. There was an injury I think to Mehmet Durakovic and I got an opportunity to play. It was special. It was a 0-0 draw and it's something that I'll always remember.

"I was really nervous out on the pitch but it went quite well and I remember the manager telling me he was pleased with my debut and hoped that I'd get many more. Luckily for me I've stayed in the national team and been a regular member ever since."

really disappointed we lost to Kuwait because it makes it harder for them and it comes down to their last match against Kuwait. They'll have to beat us and then them to go through. They're looking forward to coming out to Australia. They've never been to Sydney," he said.

All Hyundai A-League fans would welcome a player of Popovic's experience to their clubs... and it is still something that he is considering. "I signed a one-year deal (for Al-Arabi). I had the option to sign a two-year deal but I signed for one year to see how it goes. I've always maintained I'd like to finish in Australia. Especially now, I'd like to play in the new league but we'll see how it goes. I wouldn't play if I felt that physically I wasn't up to it. I wouldn't let myself down just to go through the motions. If I felt I could compete and do well and contribute and help the league on the field, I would do it.

"I follow it a bit because a lot of players that play there are friends of mine. I'm interested to see how they're going. Obviously I check the Sydney team the most. I know a lot of the boys there and I grew up playing with a few of them. I'm also good mates with Musky [Kevin Muscat] and Okon [Paul Okon]. Now there's Lazza [Stan Lazaridis] who's back and Viddy [Tony Vidmar] and they're guys who when I see them, we're mates. I'm always interested to see if they're fit and well."

Despite the retirements following tonight's game and the newfound fortunes for the national side, Socceroo fans needn't despair that more doom and gloom lies ahead. Poppa believes that with the right development, the Socceroos remain in good stead and the strong majority of 2006's players will form the backbone for the next World Cup campaign. As new blood enters the fold, he thinks our young players have the quality to continue the momentum.

"As a footballing nation we're definitely in safe hands. But if people expect results and miracles overnight they're not going to happen," he explains. "What you've got to remember is that everyone starts when someone gets injured... When someone got injured I got seven or eight games under my belt and within that time I gained a bit more experience and confidence and then finally felt a part of it. These guys are the same. They can't be expected to walk in and in one or two games set the world alight. It's going to take time. We've got to be patient and hopefully the group will gel and some outstanding players will emerge for the Socceroos. I'm sure we'll see that in the next generation."

For the retiring Socceroos, tonight is special. But for those of us here and lucky to witness it, it's also a special night. Australia's retiring players are a part of 'new football' but just as importantly, they were part of 'old soccer' too. They're the ones who bridged the gap. Whether Poppa, or the Socceroos of his generation realise it or not, they've helped changed the sport in Australia forever.

"Knowing that most of the boys are coming back is special and obviously with it being my last camp I'm going to cherish it and enjoy every moment. It's going to be a great 10 days.

"It won't be sad for me. I'm very content with what I'm doing. I know it's the right thing to do and like I said, I'm looking forward to the games and after that to being a fan at Socceroo matches. It will be great to catch up with the boys. I have a lot of good mates there and it'll be nice to see them all."

Take a bow, Poppa. ■

ALL THE SMALL THINGS

AFTER LEAVING Australian shores to play overseas in 1995 (for the Wolverhampton Wanderers in England), Poppa still misses life in Australia, but has represented his country with honour at club level too.

"There are a lot of things I've missed. It's been a long time since I've been home! Most of all I miss my family and friends who are the most important things to me and not being with them regularly is hard but I know that that is coming and I'm looking forward to when that happens.

"At the moment I've got no regrets and enjoy what I'm doing. I love playing football and I love everything about it from the training to the playing. I'm still very motivated to do well. I'm not just here to make up the numbers in Qatar. I want to do myself proud here. I'm the first Australian here too, and that really means a lot to me."

VITAL STATISTICS

Born: 4 July 1973, Sydney
Height: 194 cms
Weight: 83 kgs
Debut: v Colombia (0-0), Brisbane, February 1995
Last match: v Brazil (0-2), Munich (Aus), 18 June 2006

NATIONAL HONOURS

TOTAL: 58 appearances and eight goals.

1995: Colombia, Colombia, Japan, Ghana, Ghana, Ghana, New Zealand, New Zealand

1996: Japan, Japan, Sweden, Sweden, Scotland, Ghana, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Tahiti, Tahiti

1997: Hungary, Tahiti

1998: Croatia, USA

1999: World Stars

2000: Czech Republic, Paraguay, Paraguay, Cook Islands (1 goal), Vanuatu, New Zealand, Scotland

2001: Tonga (1 goal), American Samoa (2 goals), Fiji, Samoa (2 goals), Mexico, France, Japan, Brazil, New Zealand, New Zealand

2003: England (1 goal), Ireland

2004: Venezuala, South Africa, Solomon Islands, Solomon Islands, Norway

2005: South Africa, Iraq, Indonesia (sub), New Zealand, Germany, Solomon Islands, Uruguay, Uruguay

2006: Greece (sub), Brazil, Paraguay

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ONE TO WATCH

KRISTIAN SARKIES
THE APPRENTICE

Melbourne Victory's 20 year-old attacking midfielder shows flashes of brilliance and true class

by Richard Cann

THE QANTAS SOCCEROOS' World Cup warm-up match against Liechtenstein may not have been the most memorable game of football, but those lucky enough to have caught the final six minutes witnessed the debut of one of Australia's stars of tomorrow.

The excitement surrounding Melbourne Victory midfielder Kristian Sarkies' talent was given instant credibility when he came on late in the game after being called up to the Socceroos party just days earlier.

While Guus Hiddink gushed at the skills the youngster displayed in World Cup training sessions, few people are more familiar with Sarkies than Victory coach Ernie Merrick.

As a former head coach at Victorian Institute of Sport, Merrick worked with the young prospect for five years, labelling him one of the most exciting talents to emerge from the Institute.

Having built an impressive reputation at the VIS, Kristian made his NSL debut at just 16 and also represented Australia at the 2003 FIFA U-17 World Championships and the 2005 FIFA U-20 World Championships.

He then renewed acquaintances with his old coach when Merrick signed him as part of the Victory squad for the inaugural Hyundai A-League season, when many were saying an older, more experienced player might serve the team better.

Sarkies rewarded his coach's faith by showing off his dazzling offensive skills in a difficult season for the Victory. He dished out almost one-third of Victory's goal assists, easily leading the team with five despite logging far fewer minutes than many of his teammates.

So you'd be excused for wondering why Kristian has spent so much time on the bench for Victory so far this season, despite his debut in the Socceroo jersey.

Firstly, it's important to remember that he has not yet celebrated his 20th birthday. With Victory's struggles last season, Merrick has decided to go with more experience in his midfield, which has often left him on the fringes of the first team.

And at such a young age, his game is also still developing. The rap on Sarkies has been that he doesn't work hard enough on his defensive duties and lacks a true goal-scoring instinct for a player who likes to get forward so much, but it is something both coach and player are working hard on improving this season.

One thing the pundits are in no doubt about is his ability to deliver a moment of magic with a deadly through-ball or threatening cross.

The career of David Beckham has shown the impact a player with one special skill can have, but it seems Merrick is demanding that Sarkies complements his mastery of the set piece with a well rounded game.

If he can do this, Sarkies could be one of the best Socceroos of his generation. ■

VITAL STATISTICS
Born: 25 October 1986, Melbourne VIC
Club: Melbourne Victory
Height: 177 cms

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THE LOWS

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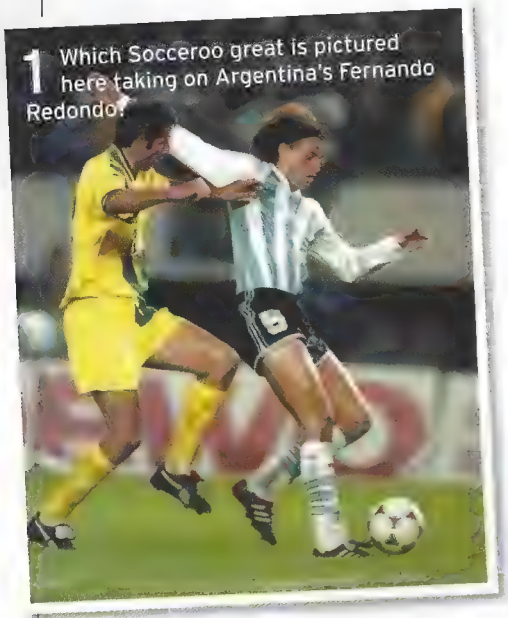


1 Which Socceroo great is pictured here taking on Argentina's Fernando Redondo?

2 When was the Bahrain Football Federation formed?

3 Which team denied Bahrain a place in the 2006 World Cup Finals?

4 Where did Bahrain finish in the 2004 Asian Cup?

5 Who was the top scorer at the 2004 Asian Cup Finals?

6 When was the first Asian Cup held?

7 How many teams entered the 2007 Asian Cup?

8 Which two teams withdrew from the 2007 Asian Cup qualifiers?

9 Which teams have won the most Asian Cups?

10 What was Bahrain's FIFA world ranking in August?

11 In August the Qantas Socceroos were ranked 37th according to FIFA. What is their ranking according to the World Football Elo Ratings?

12 Australia beat Bahrain earlier this year in their first Asian Cup qualifying game. Who scored for Australia?

13 When Australia drew 2-2 with Iran on 29 November 1997, who was the referee? And where was he from?

14 Which Premiership club did David Carney sign for as a 16 year-old?

15 In what year did Australia play its first full international against England?

16 Name at least three European clubs that ex-Socceroo skipper Paul Okon has played for.

17 Who was the leading scorer of left-footed goals in the English Premiership in both the 2002-3 and 2003-4 seasons?

18 When was Aussie Stadium opened?

19 What event attracted Aussie Stadium's biggest ever crowd?

20 Who was Australia's final opponent in qualifying for the 1974 World Cup Finals?

21 Who scored the goal that sent Australia to Germany '74?

22 Who was sent off in Australia's 1974 World Cup Finals match against Chile?

23 Which former Socceroo's autobiography is titled *The Hard Way*?

24 Who were the two Hyundai A-League players in Australia's 2006 World Cup Finals squad?

25 Who once described playing football for Australia as being "like surfing for England"?

26 Who is the Socceroos' all-time leading goalscorer?

27 How many Australian-born players were in the Croatian squad for the 2006 World Cup Finals?

28 Name these Aussies with the 'do's?

ANSWERS!

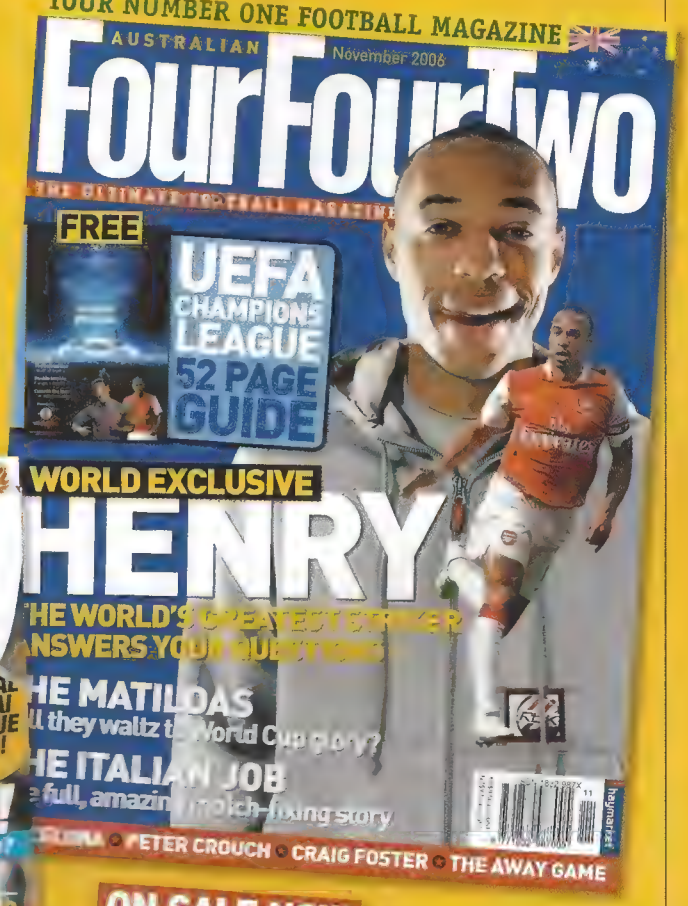
1: Milan Ivanovic **2:** 1957 **3:** Trinidad & Tobago **4:** Fourth **5:** Ayala Hubail (Bahrain) and Ali Karimi (Iran) – five goals **6:** 1956 **7:** 25 **8:** Sri Lanka, Lebanon **9:** Iran, Japan and Saudi Arabia (3 times) **10:** 93rd **11:** 18th **12:** Josip Skoko, Ahmed Elrich, Archie Thompson **13:** Sandor Puhl from Hungary **14:** Everton **15:** 1980 **16:** Leeds United, Lazio, Club Brugges, Middlesbrough, Fiorentina **17:** Harry Kewell **18:** 1988 **19:** Robbie Williams **20:** South Korea **21:** Jimmy Mackay **22:** Ray Richards **23:** Robbie Slater **24:** Mark Milligan and Michael Beauchamp **25:** Craig Johnston **26:** Damian Mori **27:** 3 (Dladlica, Šerić and Šimunić) **28:** Anthony Carbone, Milan Blagojević

THREE UP FRONT

ON SALE NOW

OFFICIAL FFA SOUVENIR EDITION

The complete record of the Qantas Socceroos' 2006 World Cup campaign



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The new and improved official match day programme of the Hyundai A-League

ONLY FOOTBALL MATTERS haymarket

Meet the Socceroos

FourFourTwo's Aidan Ormond runs the rule over the Socceroo squad selected by Graham Arnold to take on Bahrain on home soil

BAHRAIN IS A Middle Eastern nation so we thought we'd let defender Tony Popovic give his verdict on how Australia should approach tonight's opponents as he is currently playing in Qatar and is the teammate of two of the Bahrain players!

"I think the players [Qantas Socceroos] realise what they can do now. We've played against them now, we've played away from home and we've played Kuwait so the boys will know what to expect. At home we should be confident enough and good enough to turn them over," he said.

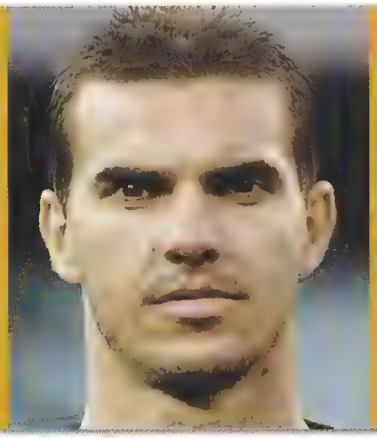
Either way, the Bahrain side are keen for a huge upset and the Socceroos cannot take them lightly.

AUSTRALIA

MATCH OFFICIALS (United Arab Emirates)
Referee Fareed Ali Mohamed AL MARZOUQI
Assistant Referees Ahmed Yaqqob MOHAMED & Mohamed Jasem Saif Hamad AL MEHAIRI
4th Official Ali Hamad Madhad Saif AL BADWAWI

STAFFING
Head of Delegation Phillip Wolanski
Team Manager Gary Moretti
Head Coach Graham Arnold
Asst Coach John Kosmina
Goalkeeping Coach Tony Franken
Conditioner Anthony Crea
Video Analyst Peter Cklamovski
Doctor Dr Mark Jones
Physio Cameron Dunkerley
Masseur Luke Attwell
Equipment Manager Dominic Rabsch
Media Manager Stuart Hodge
TV Unit Lindsay McNeill

GOALKEEPERS



Ante Covic 12

AGE: 31
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: HAMMARBY (SWEDEN)
HEIGHT: 194 CMS

Ante received his first Socceroo call up against Bahrain in February where he had a good debut in Australia's 3-1 win. However, with Schwarzer and Kalac locked in a furious battle for a starting berth, Covic had to be content with his role as third choice 'keeper at the World Cup in Germany. But for those who saw the former Marconi keeper train in Germany, they'll attest to his commitment and motivation to grab that number one spot. This excellent shot-stopper is a product of Hurstville ZSC juniors in Sydney and has been on the books of Greek clubs POAK and Kavala before his move to Hammarby in Sweden.

Mark Schwarzer 1

AGE: 34
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: MIDDLESBROUGH (ENGLAND)
HEIGHT: 193 CMS

Mark is a legend of Australian football. His saves in the penalty shootout against Uruguay last year are now part of Aussie sporting folklore. In fact, he began his Socceroo career in similar fashion by stopping a shootout penalty in a 1993 World Cup qualifier against Canada in his first full senior appearance. Following a self-imposed retirement in 1998, Schwarzer took over the mantle of Australia's number one in 2000 and has fended off Zeljko Kalac for the spot ever since. "Schwarzy" turned 34 last week but is still at the top of his game and could well be the first choice keeper for our next World Cup qualifying campaign.

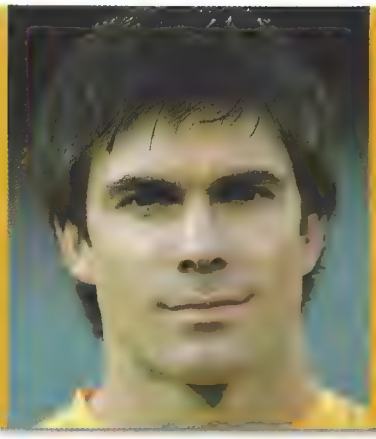
GOALKEEPERS

Zeljko Kalac 18

AGE: 33
POSITION: GOALKEEPER
CLUB: AC MILAN (ITALY)
HEIGHT: 202 CMS

Zeljko is one of our most loyal and proud Socceroos. Competing for the jersey alongside the likes of Mark Schwarzer, Robbie Zabica and Mark Bosnich for much of his 14-year national team career, it hasn't been easy to nail down a regular starting spot. Still, 53 appearances for the green and gold is a fantastic achievement for the AC Milan man. "Spider's" club career began at Sydney United before spells in leagues in England, Holland and now Italy, where the gangly 202cm keeper is putting pressure on Brazilian glovesman Dida for the top spot at the Serie A club.

DEFENDERS



Michael Beauchamp 26

AGE: 25
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: NURNBERG (GERMANY)
HEIGHT: 191 CMS

Michael made his national team debut against Bahrain away last February in our Asian Cup group qualifiers. The 25 year-old had an outstanding game as the Socceroos won 3-1. He was also part of our last Asian Cup match, a 2-0 defeat in the heat of Kuwait City. With retirements in the Socceroo defence, the German-based Aussie has a wonderful opportunity now to establish himself in the national team. Although the Sydney-born player didn't get on the park in Germany, the experience will be vital as "Meggs" looks towards the 2007 Asian Cup and the World Cup qualifiers for South Africa 2010.

Stan Lazaridis 11

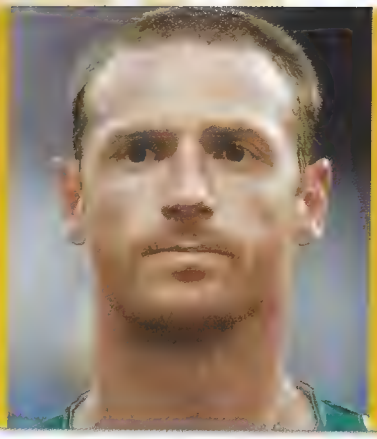
AGE: 34
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: PERTH GLORY (AUSTRALIA)
HEIGHT: 175 CMS

"Lazza" is one of the most popular, and skilful, Socceroos of the current generation. Although the Perth Glory player didn't see any game time in Germany, Socceroo interim-coach Graham Arnold is a big admirer of the former Birmingham City, West Ham and West Adelaide defender, who attacks down the left with speed and mesmeric skill in one-on-one situations. A good example is Stan's superb display against David Beckham when Australia defeated England 3-1 in London three years ago. Lazaridis is another of the Socceroos of 2006 strongly considering his national team future after 70 appearances in the green and gold. Tonight's encounter will be special for Stan...

Mark Milligan 33

AGE: 21
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC (AUSTRALIA)
HEIGHT: 180 CMS

The Hyundai A-League's Mark Milligan was one of the bolters in our World Cup 2006 squad. Despite not seeing any game time in Germany, training with the likes of experienced professionals Craig Moore and Lucas Neill will have done the former Northern Spirit defender a world of good as he looks to establish himself over the next few years. The Sydneysider was part of a strong Young Socceroo squad at the 2005 World Youth Cup in Holland, where he impressed former Socceroo boss Guus Hiddink. He has also been a regular in the Hyundai A-League Sydney FC squad since last season.



Craig Moore 3

AGE: 30
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE UNITED (ENGLAND)
HEIGHT: 186 CMS

Craig is one of the great leaders in Australian football and a no-nonsense defender. He showed at the World Cup his class at the highest level with a dominating performance in all four games as well as a penalty goal against Croatia. His appearance as a 17 year-old in a very strong Young Socceroos side for the 1993 World Youth Championships gave a glimpse of what he could achieve. A stellar club career followed in Scotland with Rangers for a decade. And after a brief spell in the Bundesliga, he is now a regular with English Premier League side Newcastle United.

Kevin Muscat 46

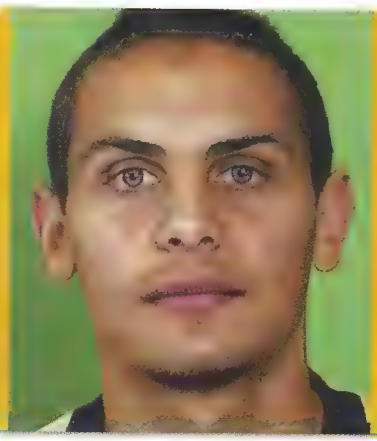
AGE: 33
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY (AUSTRALIA)
HEIGHT: 180 CMS

Kevin is enjoying one of his best years in a distinguished career. He returned to the Socceroo side after a year-long absence to captain his nation to a victory against Kuwait in August. The tough defender is also spearheading a superb Melbourne Victory team in the Hyundai A-League this season. The Victorian has represented Australia at all levels, including captaining our stellar 1993 Young Socceroo squad which reached the semi-finals of the WYC, and he represented Australia at the 1996 Olympics. Kevin had almost a decade of UK club football at Sheffield United, Wolves, Crystal Palace, Glasgow Rangers and Millwall before returning home to captain his hometown club.

Lucas Neill 2

AGE: 28
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: BLACKBURN ROVERS (ENGLAND)
HEIGHT: 183 CMS

Lucas made his Socceroo debut 10 years ago this month, but it's only in the last three years that the rugged Sydneysider has really established himself in the national team. After the World Cup in Germany, the Blackburn Rovers star became one of the most recognised Socceroos after a commanding performance that impressed many worldwide and inspired a whole new generation of kids in Australia. What's more, Lucas's heartbreak over conceding a controversial final second penalty against Italy touched the Aussie sporting public, who've since taken him to their hearts.



Jade North 35

AGE: 24
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS (AUSTRALIA)
HEIGHT: 179 CMS

A mobile and versatile defender, North fits the bill for the modern Socceroo perfectly. The Newcastle Jets right back has been recognised at national level, having played for our national U-17s, U-20s, U-23s as well as the senior side over the last seven years. North grew up in Taree, just north of Newcastle, but began his senior club career with Brisbane Strikers in the old NSL aged just 16. He progressed to Perth Glory and Sydney Olympic where he won a grand final in 2002. The Jets man was part of the Socceroos' first ever AFC match against Bahrain last February.

DEFENDERS

Tony Popovic 6

AGE: 33
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: AL ARABI (QATAR)
HEIGHT: 194 CMS

Tony is drawing the curtain on his wonderful Socceroo career this month. He began his 58-game national team career 11 years ago against Colombia in Brisbane. Back then, he had experienced defenders Tobin and Ivanovic to help him. Now aged 33, "Poppa" is helping the next generation by allowing younger defenders to be given a chance. Tony's performance in both qualifiers against Uruguay in 2005 – particularly the Montevideo leg – showed why he's considered one of our toughest-ever defenders. He also scored seven goals for Australia, including that brilliant headed effort against England in 2003. All Aussie fans will want to thank Tony for his wonderful contribution to the Socceroos.

Tony Vidmar 5

AGE: 36
POSITION: DEFENDER
CLUB: CENTRAL COAST MARINERS (AUSTRALIA)
HEIGHT: 187 CMS

Tony is one of the greatest-ever national team players. The Adelaide-born defender was an integral part of a stellar Barcelona Olympics side in 1992. He has also played in four World Cup campaigns with his final shot at glory coming last November. Tony's shootout penalty goal helped clinch a spot in Germany and banish the demons of past campaigns. Tragically, he was robbed of a spot in Germany by a heart condition in the lead-up to the tournament. Fortunately it has cleared up and he's now back in Australia and playing in the Hyundai A-League with the Mariners after an excellent 13-year career in European club football.

MIDFIELDERS

Mark Bresciano 23

AGE: 26
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: PALERMO (ITALY)
HEIGHT: 172 CMS

After representing Australia at the 1999 World Youth Championships and 2000 Olympics, Mark moved to the powerful Italian league and Empoli. He has since established himself in the tough Serie A as one of the best attacking midfielders with a real eye for goals. Following his stint with Empoli, the former NSL player made a big-money move to Parma before a transfer to Palermo after the 2006 World Cup. The Melbourne-born player – who made his Socceroo debut in 2001 – scored the all-important goal in the second leg World Cup qualifier against Uruguay last year to help Australia reach Germany 2006.

Tim Cahill 4

AGE: 26
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: EVERTON (ENGLAND)
HEIGHT: 178 CMS

Tim's Socceroo debut in 2004 against South Africa in London – after a protracted dispute over his eligibility to play for Australia – heralded a new era for the national team's midfield. He's been a regular ever since and has bagged 11 goals for his nation. Cahill is the complete midfielder – he has powerful engines, is a good tackler and ghosts into the penalty box to score at vital times. Tim's two goals against Japan at this year's World Cup brought the nation to a standstill and the Everton man continued his big-game scoring in the first Merseyside derby against Liverpool in September. "Tiny Tim" is a huge star of the current Socceroos and a certainty for selection for the Asian Cup and the next World Cup.

Scott Chipperfield 14

AGE: 30
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: FC BASEL (SWITZERLAND)
HEIGHT: 180 CMS

Scott is one of the best-ever Socceroos to come from the south coast of NSW. "Chippers" was part of a Wollongong Wolves side that won back-to-back championships in 2000 and 2001 before being snapped up by Swiss powerhouse Basel. In the last five years, he's won multiple championships at club level and has played in numerous champions league matches for the Swiss side. At Socceroo level, Scott made his national team debut in 1998 and the attacking midfielder, who can play on the left side of defence, was one of our best in Germany at this year's World Cup.

Jason Culina 17

AGE: 26
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: PSV EINDHOVEN (HOLLAND)
HEIGHT: 175 CMS

Jason is now a vital part of the Socceroo midfield after breaking into the national side in early 2005. There was little doubt that Culina would make the national team after he graduated to senior club football aged just 16 in the old NSL with Sydney United. After an up-and-down career in Europe over the last six years, his talents were finally able to blossom at PSV Eindhoven last year under the guidance of ex-Socceroo boss Guus Hiddink. His mobility, link play and ability to play the ball out of midfield intelligently will be vital for the Socceroos as they look to win the Asian Cup next year.

Brett Emerton 7

AGE: 27
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: BLACKBURN ROVERS (ENGLAND)
HEIGHT: 185 CMS

Brett made his Socceroo debut as a teenager under English super-coach Terry Venables in 1998. Since then, he has been one of our most consistent national team players and has a tally of 11 goals in the green and gold. Emerton captained our Olympics 2000 side, played in the Dutch league with Feyenoord before a transfer to Blackburn in the English Premiership in 2003. The former Sydney Olympic man is one of the fittest players in the Socceroos, as well as being one of the trickiest right-sided players around. "Emmo" can also pop up with the occasional spectacular goal.

Vince Grella 13

AGE: 27
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: PARMA (ITALY)
HEIGHT: 183 CMS

Vince has become a vital member of the Socceroos in his role as a holding midfielder screening the back four. Growing up in Melbourne's Springvale, Grella debuted with NSL side Carlton as a teenager before moving to Italy and Empoli in 1998. Grella signed with Parma in 2004 where he recently captained the side. He made his full Socceroo debut against England in 2003 and his gritty performances against Uruguay in the qualifiers were integral in helping Australia reach the World Cup finals. His steady performances in Germany show that Grella will be a certainty for the Asian Cup finals 2007. The Aussie star celebrated his 27th birthday a few days ago.

MIDFIELDERS

Josip Skoko 8

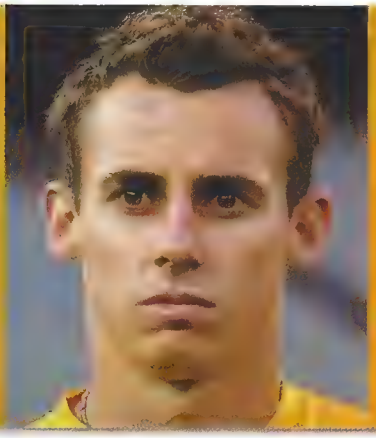
AGE: 30
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: WIGAN (ENGLAND)
HEIGHT: 177 CMS

Josip has had an impressive year in the green and gold despite not seeing game time at the 2006 World Cup. The hard-working midfielder scored for Australia – and captained the side – in Bahrain in February in our first-ever Asian Cup match. He followed this up with a terrific goal in a friendly against Greece in May. Skoko has scored nine goals for the Socceroos and has played his club football in Croatia, Belgium (where he became the first Aussie to captain a European team to a domestic championship with Genk), Turkey and now England. He began his career with North Geelong Warriors in Melbourne.

Mile Sterjovski 39

AGE: 27
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: BASEL (SWITZERLAND)
HEIGHT: 180 CMS

Mile is another talented product of the Wollongong football scene. He first got noticed in the late 90s with Sydney United in the NSL, where he formed a brilliant strike partnership with Joel Griffiths. After a spell with Parramatta Power and an appearance for the Young Socceroos at the WYC in 1999, he moved to Europe in 2000 – first with Lille in France then Switzerland's Basel. His versatility has seen him play as more of an attacking wide midfielder during his European club career and with the Socceroos, where he played three out of four games at this year's World Cup.



Luke Wilkshire 20

AGE: 25
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: FC TWENTE (HOLLAND)
HEIGHT: 175 CMS

From playing in the English lower leagues to a starting spot in the World Cup and a move to the Dutch first division – this has been a massive year for Luke. The Wollongong-born speedster first got noticed when as a key member of our Athens 2004 Olympics side. But a desire to play regular first team football saw him move from Middlesbrough in the English Premiership to Bristol City in division two. However, coach Guus Hiddink liked what he saw and picked "Wilky" for the Socceroos' World Cup campaign. And with a move to Dutch club FC Twente this year, the midfielder looks to have a very bright future.

STRIKERS

John Aloisi 15

AGE: 30
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: ALAVES (SPAIN)
HEIGHT: 188 CMS

It's been a remarkable 18 months for the La Liga-based striker. After bagging four goals at the 2005 Confederations Cup, John wrote his own unforgettable chapter in Australian sporting history in November with a penalty goal sealing Australia's qualification to the 2006 World Cup. And seven months later, the Adelaide-born striker's wonderful solo effort against Japan at the World Cup capped off our first-ever World Cup victory. With an average of nearly a goal every second game for the Socceroos, Aloisi is one of our most potent goal-poachers going into next year's Asian Cup and beyond.

Alex Brosque 28

AGE: 22
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: SYDNEY FC (AUSTRALIA)
HEIGHT: 183 CMS

Alex has long been considered one of the best young strikers in the country. After impressing as a junior in Smithfield, Sydney (the same area as Harry Kewell) he went on to the AIS in 2001 and to play for Marconi in the old NSL. A stint at Westerlo in Belgium following his appearances at the 2004 Olympics gave him valuable experience, which he has used in the Hyundai A-League, first with Queensland Roar and this season with Sydney FC. Brosque was called up for Australia's first Asian Cup match in Bahrain last February although he didn't see any game time. The striker turns 23 tomorrow.

Travis Dodd 45

AGE: 26
POSITION: MIDFIELDER
CLUB: ADELAIDE UNITED (AUSTRALIA)
HEIGHT: 177 CMS

Travis made a stunning debut for the Socceroos back in August. Scoring to break the 0-0 deadlock against Kuwait in our Asian Cup qualifier was a dream for the speedy Adelaide United midfielder. It's been a steady rise up the ranks for Dodd, who made his senior club debut aged 16 for Adelaide City in the old NSL. He also made his Joeys debut in 1996 too, but since then the 26 year-old has played his club football in Malaysia and Greece - where he scored for Panionios in a UEFA Cup tie against Udinese - as well as in Australia for Newcastle Breakers and Parramatta before signing for Kosmina's Reds.

Josh Kennedy

AGE: 24
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: NURNBERG (GERMANY)
HEIGHT: 192 CMS

Josh was one of the surprise selections in Guus Hiddink's 2006 World Cup squad, but it proved a wise choice with excellent contributions off the bench by the gangly striker. Wodonga-born Josh has been based in Germany for the past six years, where he's steadily built a reputation as a skilful target man. In fact, the former Joey was the youngest Australian - aged 18 - to appear in the Bundesliga back in 2001 for Wolfsburg. Since then, he's been on the books of Stuttgart Kickers, Koln, Dynamo Dresden and now Nurnberg, where he unfortunately got injured in his first training session after signing recently. Kennedy is due back playing this January. He will not be playing tonight.

Archie Thompson 22

AGE: 27
POSITION: STRIKER
CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY (AUSTRALIA)
HEIGHT: 174 CMS

Arguably the Socceroos' most exciting forward, Archie played a crucial role in our qualification for Germany when he ran his heart out for 52 minutes in Montevideo last November. He warmed the bench in Germany and is now more determined than ever to jag a run-on berth of his own. His 21 goals in a Socceroo shirt include 13 in one match against American Samoa in 2001. His form this season with Hyundai A-League high-flyers Melbourne has been impressive following a short stint with Dutch giants PSV Eindhoven at the end of last season. At almost 28, Archie should be a key man for the Socceroos at next year's Asian Cup.

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ADAM "TUNNA" TENNENINI
THE SPIRIT LIVES ON

Fans like "Tunna" are helping ensure the legend of Johnny Warren continues to live on

interview by Richard Cann

AGE: 28

EARLIEST SOCCEROO MEMORY:
Those tight adidas gold jerseys from the '80's. They'd be worth a mint now.

YOUR FIRST SOCCEROOS MATCH?:
Australia v Czechoslovakia at Olympic Park in 1986. I've still got the match programme. Just looking through it, our boys actually have their occupations listed. How far we've come since.

WHICH SOCCEROO DID YOU PRETEND TO BE AS A KID?:
I grew up wanting to one day replicate the goal scored by Charlie Yankos, against then World Champions Argentina in 1988.

FAVOURITE SOCCEROO:
The aura, the legend and the spirit of Johnny Warren lives on. An immortal, and the undisputed modern day father of football in this country. It was his vision that sees us placed proudly as a respected football nation.

FAVOURITE CURRENT SOCCEROO:
I have two. Lucas Neill. We were all aware of his ability, but he really came of age at the World Cup. He was such a prominent figure and our most outstanding player. It's a shame that he'll probably be remembered for the penalty against Italy. Vinnie Grella does all the hard work and sometimes goes unnoticed. He knows his limitations and adapts tactically to everything thrown at him.

FAVOURITE SOCCEROO MOMENT:
Easy! (Sing the following out loud) "Oh what a night, late November back in zero five, we kept Johnny Warren's dream alive, I rememberrrrrr what a night". I'd have to say the Japan and Croatia games in Germany are on par also.

CRAZIEST SOCCEROO STORY:
There were so many crazy stories from Germany. I think the train ride aboard the 'Aussie Express' from Stuttgart-Munich after the Croatia game sticks out most. The 'disco' carriage was packed as we danced, sang and celebrated.

FAVOURITE SOCCEROO STRIP:
I quite like the current strip, but the most memorable is definitely the 'spew', 'camouflage' or 'whatever you want to call it' jersey.

WHERE WERE YOU FOR ALOISI'S PENALTY GOAL?:
I was directly behind the right hand post. I could see it was going in as soon as it left his boot. I was all over my mates before it hit the net I think.

WHAT ABOUT THE WORLD CUP?:
I was one of the lucky ones to be in Germany. A trip filled with amazing moments. The partying, the friends made, emotions shared, those that were there will understand what I mean. Seeing the Socceroos live at the highest level was absolutely brilliant.

WHERE DID YOU WATCH THE ITALY MATCH AT THE WORLD CUP?:
The Fritz Walter stadium in Kaiserslautern. I was behind the opposite goal to the penalty like so many other Australians. Again, an experience I'll never forget mainly for the rollercoaster of emotions

NAME A SOCCEROO TO WATCH FOR THE FUTURE:
Keep your eye out for two Melbourne lads doing great things. I expect Adrian Leijer and Kristian Sarkies to become household names by the next World Cup.

There was a ton o' partyin' down in Germany by the Aussie contingent!

NUMBER CRUNCH

All the numbers you need to know about Australia's opponent

1966

THE YEAR THE BAHRAINI FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION WAS AFFILIATED TO FIFA

688,345

BAHRAIN'S POPULATION

1

THE NUMBER OF GOALS BAHRAIN SCORED DURING THEIR TWO-LEG PLAYOFF FOR 2006 WORLD CUP QUALIFICATION. THEIR OPPONENTS, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, SCORED TWO

973

BAHRAIN'S INTERNATIONAL DIALLING CODE

44

THE BAHRAIN FOOTBALL TEAM'S HIGHEST OFFICIAL FIFA RANKING, IN SEPTEMBER 2004

4

THE NUMBER OF COUNTRIES HOSTING THE 2007 ASIAN CUP: INDONESIA, MALAYSIA, THAILAND AND VIETNAM

2

THE NUMBER OF APPEARANCES BAHRAIN HAS MADE AT THE ASIAN CUP FINALS (1988 AND 2004)

23 THE NUMBER OF DAYS THE ASIAN CUP RUNS ACROSS. THE 2007 ASIAN CUP IS BEING HELD FROM JULY 7 TO JULY 29

we believe in the potential of people to do amazing things

Ironic, isn't it? In order for Mark Schwarzer to reach his goals, he has to stop them. Luckily for Australia, and Mark, he's very good at doing just that. He has talent, the commitment to turn that talent into ability, and the confidence to do what he does on the big stage.

At NAB, we believe, if you have a dream, with commitment, and the right words here and there, you can get there. We also believe, when you know you have the right sort of support behind you, it gives you the confidence to push yourself that little bit further. That's where we believe we can help. We know we have the experience to guide you. And, as history shows, we're prepared to back people who are prepared to have a go.

Start reaching. Your dreams may be closer than you think.

what is it you want?

National Australia Bank
Official Partner

AUSTRALIA

Socceroo & Proud NAB Ambassador **Mark Schwarzer**

nab

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